Self-fashioning, freedom, and the problem of his-story: the return of noir

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Abstract: This article considers the theme of self-fashioning in film noir through an analysis of Jacques Tourneur's Out of the Past (1947) and, as a distant remake, David Cronenberg's A History of Violence (2005). It addresses ways in which subjectivity is determined socially, considering historical notions of freedom and self-fashioning, Lacanian notions of subjectivity, and a crisis in masculine authority that marked the classic noir period and contributed to moralizing about the possibility of escaping one's past and reinventing oneself. By readdressing noir's depiction of the American myth of self-fashioning, Cronenberg develops a narrative field that returns to portrayals of gendered authority in order to consider how they might be renegotiated.

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1 With a mix of two patently American film genres - *film noir* and the western - David Cronenberg's critically acclaimed *A History of Violence* (2005) sets up a group of oppositions through the story of a man who leaves a life of crime and violence behind to assume a new identity, start a family, and settle down in the quiet town of Millbrook, Indiana. The oppositions between gangster thug, super-killer and good citizen, family-man are paralleled in another opposition particularly typical to the noir genre: between benevolent small-town life and the belligerent city. The narrative establishes these oppositions in order to consider how they eventually clash or coalesce in time, and how the past might affect the future; for it is the difference between an abandoned past and an inevitable future that structures the action within this film. As the film's title suggests, the element of *history* in *History of Violence* takes up a position of centrality for the portrayal of American mythologies on a variety of levels.

2 In addition to foregrounding a split between past and present, there is a dominant tone of nostalgia throughout the film, marking the phantasmatic nature of the past as it manifests itself in the present. For example, in one of numerous references to American mythology that Cronenberg makes regarding the film, he states: "the reality in this movie is [...] a fantasy of a reality. It's a kind of a gesture towards that American yearning for a naïve innocent past of the 1940s 1950s that possibly never existed." Such an element of nostalgia is supported visually in scenes that resemble iconic Americana. When Cronenberg notes "that street is very Edward Hopperish," one can't help but recall that it is precisely this 'false' nostalgic yearning, whose artificiality Hopper stresses, that is at work in such images.[1] In this sense, the narrative concerns itself not only with the past as a historical condition, the 'actuality' of the past upon which a present is contingent, but with fantasies and phantoms of the past as they are related to American mythologies. Also central to the narrative of *A History of Violence* is a theme recurrent in American

mythologies dealing with the past and a sense of historicity in relation to identity: the theme of reinvention through self-fashioning.

3 For its commentary on the myth of self-fashioning, *A History of Violence* puts itself in direct dialogue with the past by taking recourse to the noir genre, particularly in its parallels to what, as Elizabeth Cowie points out, is "often cited as the quintessential *noir* film:" Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947).[2] Parallels between the films are many. Both are about a man attempting to escape his violent past by assuming a new identity, relocating to a small town, starting a business, and seeking to establish binding symbolic fictions. Or to put it another way, they both stage the small-town American dream that's implicit in even the quaint 'Anywhere, USA' tone of the towns they're set in: Bridgeport and Millbrook. In a more abstract but no less prominent sense, they are both about men attempting to domesticate themselves. This is diegetically supported by the fundamental roles of domesticating women and *femmes fatales* as well as gender difference. Importantly, both films also stage a return of violent phallic authority in response to the attempt at domestication. As such, it makes sense that the return in both is initially staged in the domestic setting of the small-town diner. In each, a messenger from the urban past comes to call on the noir hero in an attempt to deliver him to an all-enjoying and treacherous father- figure. And as Ian Jarvie suggests, "[t]here is nowhere to hide. The past and the underworld are everywhere" in the *noir* universe.[3]

4 At stake, then, in *film noir*'s depiction of self-fashioning and reinvention is the inevitable return of an inescapable past:

> As *film noir*'s classic period entered what Paul Schrader called its 'second phase' in the years immediately after World War II, the sense of a dark, inescapable past became a prime theme. By 1947 films such as *Body and Soul*, *The Locket*, *Nightmare Alley*, *Ride the Pink Horse*, and *Dead Reckoning* all elaborated on this theme, but none so powerfully as the most aptly titled *Out of the Past* (Silver and Ursini 31).

5 It is precisely in these terms that I would interpret Joan Copjec's statement about visibility in *noir*: "The *noir* hero is embarrassed by a visibility that he carries around *like an excess body for which he can find no proper place*" (Copjec xi, my italics). This visibility, this excess body for which the *noir* hero can find no proper place, should be thought of as the body of the past, or the hero's very historicity. One possible way to interpret *film noir*'s 'return of the past' is as a moralizing commentary on reinvention and self-fashioning, making the claim that the American dream's myth of reinvention is a romanticization of the impulse to flee one's symbolic debts and social bonds. *Out of the Past* and *A History of Violence* both portray self-fashioning with the return of the past staged as the undercurrent to and the tenebrous flipside of the American dream. I would argue that they both subscribe to the idea that an attempted escape from one's socio-symbolic, historically-bound identity must bear vicious consequences, with an eruption of violence characteristically functioning as a return of the repressed. In his reading of *Out of the Past*, Frank Krutnik describes

> Jeff's [Robert Mitchum] affair with Kathie [Jane Greer] as the traumatic past which he has to repress in order to live a 'normal' life, the repressed material forcefully re-emerging into, and overturning, his cosy small-town existence (Krutnik 104).

6 From within their historical contexts, though, *Out of the Past* (in relation to the Depression, World War II, and the demise of phallic authority) and *History of Violence* (in relation to postmodern, performative identity and chronologically at the other end of an era of gender politics that have been highly theorized, circulated, and to some extent digested in the mean time) produce very different results in their concluding statements

on reinvention, subjectivity, and the subsequent implications for masculinity. Krutnik points out that in *Out of the Past*, at stake

> is the lapse of the tough hero from the position of potency signified by his status as a 'hard-boiled' private eye, to a situation where his masculinity and identity are quashed, negated [...] [T]he 'traumatic core' of *Out of the Past* represents an extreme problematising of the fantasy of self-contained, omnipotent masculinity [otherwise characteristic of the hard-boiled *noir* style] (Krutnik 105).

7 Where *Out of the Past*'s Jeff Bailey must pay for his history of violence with the collapse of masculine authority, of the symbolic fictions he hopes to construct, and with his life, *A History of Violence* proposes a way out through a renegotiation of gendered authority and, with a communal lie subtending the family fiction, a reinvestment in symbolic debt.

8 Along with the historical development of notions of freedom and self-fashioning in American culture, drawing on the Lacanian notions freedom, symbolic debt, desire vs. drive, and paternal Law will help illuminate what goes wrong in the *noir* hero's attempt to escape the past, and why.

9 I would start with the basic assumption that one of the core 'texts' of self-fashioning in American mythology is one that espouses the possibilities of identity-based freedom and of not having to live in fear of oppression. Implicit, for example, in the promise of the immigrant's American dream is the possibility for individuals to shed certain stereotypes and negative associations or experiences that adhered to who they were in the place they were from. In this sense, it encouraged individuals to 'start over,' transferring their 'selves' into a new context, while at the same time upholding the myth of the autonomous humanist individual who has a core self that can be transplanted from one topological and cultural topography to another. Take, for example, the various Dutch or English settlers who relocated to North America and, rather than cutting themselves off from their cultural history, brought with them what they surely felt to be essential cultural practices and constituents that had defined their lives and identities.

10 In early post-war America (notably coterminous with the classic period of *film noir*), we witness a clear shift in this element of the American dream. In addition to what we might term 'cultural transplantation,' which there was also a good deal of from 1900-1940, there is suddenly and understandably a tendency to divorce one's cultural history, leaving it with an abandoned geographical topology: the waves of Latin Americans and central and eastern Europeans who moved to America, changed their names, decided *not* to pass their native languages on to their children, and tried as far as possible to cut all ties with their cultural background in order to become 'American.' With this kind of divorcing oneself from one's past, the element of *reinvention* at the site of the individual takes a radical shift in the American mythology of self-fashioning. The point was not to carry your cultural history and core beliefs into a new context, but to wipe your identity clear, insofar as this was possible, and assume a new one. Notably, and as commentary on *film noir* repeatedly makes evident, this shift also accompanies a post-war and post-depression crisis in the unifying (phallic) state authority:

> The chronotope of *film noir* [...] perversely celebrates the repressed hysteria of a postwar cultural moment when domestic and economic coherence were fractured, spatializing and concretising a 'freedom' at once attractive, frightening, and ultimately illusory (Pfeil quoting Sobchak in Copjec 229-230).

11 Perhaps the best way to contextualize the development of self-fashioning as a core cultural narrative in American mythology is through the idea and role of *freedom* as its

central component. For early colonial America, freedom had an entirely different significance from the ways in which we generally think of it today. Far from implying any indulgence of personal desire (as with contemporary notions of consumer freedom for example), freedom was perceived as a condition that held a direct correlation to social (via spiritual) responsibility: Jim Cullen suggests that "[f]reedom involved a willing surrender to the will of the Lord, a choice to defer to Godly clerical and civil authorities that ruled in His name" and quotes John Winthrop, Massachusetts Bay founder and Puritan leader, as stating that true freedom "is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority" (Cullen 21). In additional reference to self-fashioning as dependant on the social Other (God or a spiritual authority) as opposed to ego injunctions, Margo Todd states that "the self was to be formed by an outward focus on the word of the Other" (Todd 73). This statement was made in reference to how the Puritans fashioned personal identity through narrative - that of the bible - through "'hearing, reading, meditating and conferring'" (Todd 73). Thus, 'external' narratives are 'internalized' or incorporated for self-identification and re-externalized for a public display, which places the identifier's identity in the social setting, making it functional within a socio-symbolic context. Todd points out that Puritan self-fashioning "was conditioned by scriptural authority and models," and through them identification was with the "fundamentally communal" (Todd 73). Thus, spiritual freedom was intimately bound to a notion of social responsibility.

12 Roughly a century later, from the mid 1760s to the mid 1770s, with the resistance to the Stamp Act (1765) and Coercive Acts (1774), the Publication of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), the Declaration of Independence (1776), and the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), ideologies of liberty, freedom and independence were fortified. Still, the concepts of liberty and independence were formed on a politically reactionary platform and implied independence from a corrupt and unjust entity. Inherent to the idea of freedom was still an application of what was 'right' and 'good' in a social and moral context. Liberty and freedom were not thought of as boundless; rather, there was, again, a strong social and moral dimension to these concepts.

13 With the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-1800s, 'individualism' begins to take a more radical turn toward self-sufficiency, encouraging a possible view of the individual as an entity independent of the social context. In a lecture given at the Masonic Temple in Boston in January of 1842, Emerson states the following: "Society is good when it does not violate me; but best when it is likest to solitude" ("The Transcendentalist"). Nevertheless, the spiritual and moral dimensions of the Transcendentalist movement are evident throughout the period, with a concept of the spiritual as its focal point. It is not until the 1900s, with the explosion of the concepts of home ownership, consumer empowerment, and relative financial independence for the 'average' (white middle class) American family, that we see a clear break in the concepts of freedom and independence from what they had represented for the previous three hundred years in America, with the focus shifting away from an individual's freedom to partake in social responsibilities, toward the individual's freedom as it pertained to his or her own desires; or, to put it another way, freedom to partake in civic responsibility vs. freedom from civic responsibility. Though one might argue that traces of this can be found in the spiritual tendencies of both Antinomianism and Transcendentalism, for example, these movements are centered on a sense of spiritual morality, and thus always implicitly hinge on the social insofar as both morality and spirituality concern themselves with the manner in which the

individual behaves in relation to a social context. Even if this means a radical divorcing of the individual from the social, the impulse and subsequent action is based in the individual's relation to the social. What would follow with consumer empowerment and independence has neither an explicitly moral nor a spiritual dimension to it, and this is where we see the radical split represented in a purer form of individualism with consequences for symbolic investment in the social. As Marc Vernet suggests regarding *noir*'s commentary on individualism in its social dimensions,

> [t]his type of film invites us to rethink the function of Hollywood as a machine that produces dreams or fairytale spectacles, when its function was doubtless to work out in detail the ideological contradictions of a simultaneously democratic and individualist society (Vernet 17).

14 Contributing largely to the possibility of this shift is the historical trajectory of the Protestant work ethic and the development of a capitalist economy in America.

15 Because of the utilitarian justification of wealth - that one should not be idle, but rather is obliged to apply one's so-called God-given gifts, and thereby contribute to the greater social well being - the Protestant ethos eventually comes to embody a "gospel of wealth" as it was preached in some rudimentary form practically from the founding of the English colonies and onward by the likes of Cotton Mather and, later, Benjamin Franklin. Franklin can be seen as a key figure in representing the transformation of the work ethic from a theological ethos to a more secularized utilitarian ethos. As an individual of high profile, his various writings concerning utilitarian ethics, the best known of which would come to be *Poor Richard's Almanac*, eventually epitomized a secularized American work ethic and "Americanized proverbial wisdom concerning frugality, thrift, [and] industry" (Jones 206).[4] Separated by the Revolutionary War and a century of relative national prosperity, his partial ideological heirs (in terms of secularized industriousness) were people such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, as well as less philanthropic industrial giants who flourished in the era between the Civil War and the turn of the century. Though with these prominent social figures, the shift in industry and industriousness moved predominantly toward the amassing of capital and capital's significance within the secular, and away from the spiritual.

16 In the collection of articles that was published in 1900 as *The Gospel of Wealth*, Carnegie's own "references to Christianity are sparing and sometimes ironical" (Jones 217).[5] With industrial growth booming (which cooled during World War I and revitalized massively from 1920-30) and Protestant values becoming ever more secularized (recall Coolidge's "the man who builds a factory builds a temple"), ideas about individualism and freedom had clearly begun to take on new significance.

17 In the Roaring Twenties, a dramatic increase in large corporations, a burgeoning stock market, a massive surge in industrial productivity, and the proliferation of consumer products allowed and encouraged more and more people to find satisfaction in leisure and consumption. Thus consumer power and, along with it, the idea of consumer freedom became increasingly associated with personal freedom and living well (whereas earlier, luxuries were accessible strictly to the wealthy). As Ken Hillis suggests,

> [t]he postwar period has witnessed the emergence of an economic model connecting identity with consumption. The act of consumption increasingly is linked to the production of one's individual identity as a shiny commodity *without a past* (Hillis 9, my italics).

18 By this time we can clearly see two vital sociological developments: first, the shift from freedom and living *right* as at once intractably connected to spiritual, moral, and social responsibility, to freedom and living *well* as bound up in one's consumer power (one's ability or 'freedom' to partake in leisure and the accumulation of goods). Along with this came the formation and expansion of a middle class, which was effectively created by the shift toward consumer ideology. The consumption of (luxury) goods, which had, for the better part of the 18th and 19th century, been a privilege enjoyed exclusively by the ruling classes and independently wealthy, was now being made available to the average worker, who was, in turn, often working to produce these goods (directly or indirectly). Recall, for example, Henry Ford's statement that he would produce and sell cars at a price that a worker in his factory would be able to afford on the wages he paid them. In the early 1900s, the mass production of the industrial era was not being fed to a void (or back to native Europe and England, as the fur and tobacco trade once had been), but rather largely back to itself: that is, it reproduced the conditions of production, which, to a great extent, was the production of the middle-class itself, along with middle-class values, and middle-class dreams, which would increasingly define what we recognize as the American dream. The rise of consumer culture and capitalism is one factor that I would bring into focus in terms of what it comes to mean to reinvent oneself and in terms of what ideologies gain currency as American dreams. For it is with the idea of consumer empowerment that the dream of self-fashioning becomes, in theory, accessible to everyone, and the *self*, which might be recreated through a mixture of will and opportunity, becomes history-less. [6]

19 I would argue that *film noir* holds up an inverted mirror to these characteristics of consumer empowerment and financial freedom, coupled with the idea of reinvention and an (essential) element of ahistoricism, employing them, as organizing principles, to the cultural critique at work: as such, *film noir* functions as a "harsh critique of American capitalism" (Vernet 6). As Ken Hillis suggests,

> *noir* characters' belief in the American Dream allows them to see their desires for material gain as directly connected to acquiring greater agency and social status. More often than not, however, fate thwarts *noir* characters from achieving this status (Hillis 4).

20 Just think of the various films in the noir tradition in which characters intend to begin their lives anew right after they've made that next big score; or, just having made it, the ones who are on the run and trying to escape their past.

21 *Noir*'s portrayal of an impulse to flee the past, though it might often be traced back to some element of capitalist ideology (particularly the ideology of drive/fulfillment, as opposed to desire/lack), takes various forms. It may be a particular history of violence and crime the *noir* hero wishes to leave behind (*Kiss of Death*, *Dark Passage*), a husband or a wife (*Double Indemnity*, *The Postman Always rings Twice*), limited monetary access (*Criss Cross* , *Night and the City*), or, more generally, the very idea of being pinned down to particular identity-building social conventions and institutions (*D.O.A.*, *Pitfall*). Often, there is a mixture of several of these elements (*Murder, My Sweet*, *Double Indemnity*, *Kiss Me Deadly*). The assumption in all of these is the sense that the past can be escaped, that one can free oneself of one's past.

22 In discussing this element of adaptability and reinvention, and its particular connection to the American dream, Richard Feldstein refers to a statement made by Lacan in his lecture on "The Freudian Thing."[7] He localizes Lacan's position on a cultural "desire for

transformation" by reference to "a cultural ahistoricism particular to the United States of America" (Lacan 115). Lacan states: "It is this ahistoricism that defines the assimilation required if one is to be recognized in the society constituted by that culture" (Lacan 115). To claim that the American dream is based in a cultural tendency toward ahistoricism is not to claim, as Europeans are so often accused of doing, that the United States *has* no history. This idea of being 'against' history should rather be understood through the tendency toward reinvention, and, within this tendency toward reinvention, the tendency for one to try to break away from one's own historicity. This is not a tendency toward *cultural ahistoricism* ('the United States has no cultural history'), but a *cultural tendency* toward ahistoricism (the tendency toward ahistoricism at the individual level as one of many cultural constituents). In *film noir*, amnesia often functions as a trope for this cultural element of ahistoricism, such as in Joseph Mankiewicz's *Somewhere in the Night*, and, more recently, in neo-*noir* films like *Blade Runner*, *Memento*, and the work of David Lynch, where amnesia has become a leitmotif. But, as suggested by Ken Hillis's statement regarding agency and social status, this "desire for transformation" and radical attempt at reinvention in *noir* films is (almost) always met with failure, often resulting in the death of the character trying to escape their past. It is in this regard that we might view *film noir* as moralizing. In effect, *film noir* tells us that we are *not* simply free to reinvent ourselves, and in this regard it goes against the American dream's cultural injunction to believe that you can be free of your past and act according to a logic of drive.

23 The *noir* tradition comments on the clash between individual fantasy and socio-symbolic space, illustrating that when we try to realize our fantasies, our dreams, in symbolic space things tend to go horribly wrong. *Noir* narratives rewrite the Hollywood/American injunction to follow your dreams by suggesting that such a pursuit rather quickly flips over into an ardent adherence to imaginary mirror spaces, and into the return of vengeful uncanny ghosts of the past. The stakes involved in the clash between imaginary fantasy and symbolic 'reality' are always the highest: while the promise of reinvention is a new life, its unsuccessful realization imposes a consequence of death.

24 From a theoretical point of view, we might say that the pursuit of dreams, usually money or a women in *film noir*, is the pursuit of objects of desire. According to Lacan, the structure of desire requires a necessary distance to the object. We might then posit that when the protagonist of the *noir* narrative reaches the point of attaining the desired object, desire expires and consequently turns into death. Is this not the nature of the unbearable plentitude of the *femme fatale*, who arrives as a portent of the symbolic debt that must be repaid?[8] Here the adherence to fantasy and the pursuit of an object of desire incorporate two interwoven theoretical threads: adherence to fantasy results in the 'death' of the (socio-symbolic) subject in question - or, theoretically, in psychosis - and the removal of distance within the Lacanian structure of desire results in the disappearance of desire, or lack, upon which symbolic meaning is based.

25 As Juliet Flower MacCannell suggests, "*Film noir* portrays a conflicted modern subject, torn between its symbolic character (desire) and its unconscious lawlessness (drive to jouissance)."[9] Or, as Joan Copjec proposes,

> "the inversion that defines the shift from classical detection to *film noir* is to be understood not in terms of identification but in terms of the choice between sense and being, or - in the dialect of psychoanalysis - between desire and drive. Lacan has argued that this shift describes a general historical transition whose process we are still witnessing: the old modern order of desire, ruled over by an oedipal father, has begun to be replaced by a new order of the drive, in which we no longer have

> recourse to the protections against *jouissance* that the oedipal father once offered (Copjec 182).

26 In this regard, the function of the castrative No! fails or is missing; the coordinates of desire that (interpellatively) place the subject within the symbolic community and make navigation possible become replaced by drive, or an attempt to eclipse lack. This *choice for drive* is represented in *noir* as a condition of or attempt at becoming history-less.

27 In order to have recourse to Lacan's notion of the 'free' subject, a brief explanation of the rather complex notion of subjectivity and symbolic debt might be instructive. We can start from the negative position of what the subject is *not*. The Lacanian subject is not the individual, nor is it, following a grammatical structure, the entity about which we speak when discussing a person ("*he* or *she* did this or that"). It is also not related to one's idea of one's self, nor, as such, to the ego. The subject is constituted through its relation to the symbolic order and its engagement in symbolic fictions, which we might think of as the matrix, or the webbing, that serves as a cohesive within any social setting: the conduit along which relation-defining gestures and acts pass and which is structured around various sets of (spoken and unspoken) principals of engagement. With a move toward subjectivity, the individual's (imaginary) ego desires are "triangulated" as a result of the element of *Law* being introduced. As Dylan Evans points out,

28 the Law in Lacan's work refers not to a particular piece of legislation, but to the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations [...], [to] the set of universal principles which make social existence possible, the structures that govern all forms of social exchange (Evans 98).

29 A representative of this Law might be a parent, a teacher, an employer or, as often seen in *film noir*, a representative of the civic judiciary system - the district attorney or a police officer. The (partial) function of this symbolic authority is to curtail the individual's pleasure, providing a certain distance to objects of desire, which in turn facilitates the renewal or perpetuity of desire. We might think of this castrative 'triangulation' as a type of social arrangement, a contract that allows the individual to become a subject within symbolic fictions. In theory, the individual can choose whether or not to enter into this 'contract.'[10] This is where the element of freedom comes in.

30 In order for the individual to occupy a location of subjectivity, it must accept symbolic castration and (unconsciously) identify with the desire of the big Other (the representative of Other desire can be the same representative of the Law). Although this is *required* of the individual, and its status as social subject is contingent upon identification with Other desire, the individual must perceive this as a choice it is 'free' to make, as a willful entry into a contract. In this regard, we might say that it is a 'false' choice that is nonetheless perceived as a choice, or, as Lacan put it, a 'forced choice.' Lacan sums up the dynamics at play in this forced choice with the example of being robbed at gunpoint. With the phrase *your money or your life*, the thief introduces an element of choice, though this element is erroneous, as no one in their right mind would choose their money. And should they choose the money, they would forfeit both their life and the money. Thus, the choice is forced, or fictitious. The same goes for the 'free' subject.

31 The subject can either choose symbolic castration (that is, to abide by the Law of the Other's desire), or can choose to reject the Other's desire and indulge imaginary (dualistic as opposed to triangulated) ego injunctions. Such a choice is, by definition, a fantasy, an

illusion the individual indulges, in which some forbidden object of desire becomes potentially attainable. This equals socio-pathological behavior, a breach of the symbolic contract, and immediately cuts the individual out of the symbolic loop, resulting in a forfeiture of subjectivity. Such a breach of contract is depicted in *Out of the Past*, for example, by Jeff Bailey's failed attempt to flee with the father-figure's mistress. Defined as they are around a moralizing of codified social behavior and the individual's attempt to break free of or subvert the social contract in some capacity, the figurative dynamics at work in *film noir* are not unlike the dynamics structuring Lacan's theory of choice and the free subject. As a social subject, you are *not* free from the Law, and you are most certainly not free of your own past. Copjec point out that, "[h]aving chosen *jouissance*, the *noir* hero risks shattering, annihilating effects, which threaten his very status as subject" (193).

Out of the Past

32 Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947) opens with shots of mountainous nature scenes, eventually panning over to a road sign indicating the distance to several different towns and cities: Bridgeport 1 mile, Los Angeles 349, Lake Tahoe 78 miles, and so on. Suddenly, we cut to a scene in which we're following a car into Bridgeport. It pulls off to the side of the road at a gas station with the name "Jeff Bailey" posted in large script on a wooden sign attached to the roof. Another sign hangs at the front of the station with the same name, as if to insist upon the actuality of the name itself (a device Cronenberg employs as well). The man driving, tall with a black hat and overcoat, steps out of the car and whistles to the gas station attendant, who is kneeling on the ground with his back to us, fixing a tire. No response. The driver takes out a cigarette, puts it in his mouth, and honks the car horn twice. Still, there is no response. Now he walks up behind the attendant, lights his cigarette, and flicks the match at him. The boy turns around and looks at the driver, who utters the film's first words: "where's Bailey?" It's a fitting opening for a narrative about missing persons, assumed identities and deception. Equally appropriate, the attendant is a mute, and can't answer him. He shakes his head, pointing to his mouth and ears. As we will find out, it's both and act and not an act: he is deaf and dumb, but he can read lips. The driver asks him again, articulating the words with exaggeration: "where is Bailey?" Bailey, of course, is not there; but he's not there on various levels. With this opening of troubled communication and signs indicating the non-existent, together producing a focus on faulty signification (or its arbitrary nature), a manifold, circular hunt begins.

33 The opening line and the fact that the attendant (Dickie Moore) is deaf and mute are not only fitting because the driver, Stephanos (Paul Valentine), is searching for a man named Bailey, but precisely because there is no Bailey. 'Jeff Bailey,' a.k.a Jeff Markham, moved to Bridgeport not long ago and opened up service station, but nobody in Bridgeport, except perhaps the deaf and mute attendant, knows anything about his past. As we soon come to learn, Stephanos works for a man named Whit Sterling (Kirk Douglas), a racketeer and former employer of Jeff's. Stephanos has come to tell Jeff that Whit is looking for him and wants to meet with him. Jeff, however, is not eager to go. Not only had he attempted to undermine the phallic authority Whit represents by breaching the contract of employment to find and bring back Kathie Moffat; his attempt to flee with Kathie also compromises paternal castrative Law, a motif repeatedly staged in the *noir* genre: "the young hero desires and conquers a rich woman who is quite often tied to an older man or some other representative of patriarchal authority" (Cowie quoting Vernet in Copjec

122). In addition to this, Jeff has already begun to settle into his new life, having started a business and fallen in love with local Ann Miller (Virginia Huston).

34 The first time we actually see Jeff, he is with Ann at a lakeside where they meet regularly. When Ann says to him, "you've been to a lot of places haven't you," Jeff tells her, "one too many." Then she asks him which he liked the best, and he responds, "this one right here." Jeff signals a desire for a new life, one not connected to his past. He tells her he'd like to buy a house right there, marry her and settle down. Though once Jeff gets back to the station, talks with Stephanos, and decides he should go see Whit, he decides to tell Ann about his history and who he is, or was. He's going to see Whit because he's "tired of running." While they drive to Whit's house in Lake Tahoe, Jeff explains that 'Bailey' is not his real name at all, but rather Jeff Markham, and that he had worked as a private detective. As he explains, his history unfolds in a set of flashback sequences. We learn that on his last case he was hired to find Sterling's mistress, Kathie, who had shot Sterling and stolen $40,000 from him. This outburst of feminine *jouissance* against phallic authority marks Kathie from the very beginning as a *femme fatale*, setting her apart from Ann in a manner that enjoys in ways that Ann cannot, and as an impossible object of desire (the *femme fatale* is rather the *subject of drive*). As Elisabeth Bronfen points out,

> feminine *jouissance* gives voice to the promise that an originary wound, upon which all fantasy work as well as all symbolic obligations and debts are built, can be healed, even while the mise-en-scène of desire it performs only serves to play through the impossibility of this promise" (Bronfen 179-80).

35 In addition to the dualistic fantasy already implicit in Jeff's attempt to compromise paternal Law and his proximity to feminine *jouissance*, the flashback sequences are continuously marked by elements of flight and ahistoricity, further signifying disengagement from symbolic fictions always already determined through lack and Law.

36 Employed by Whit, Jeff first tracks Kathie to Acapulco. In addition to Kathie's own flight, Acapulco itself offers a sense of ahistoricity. For example, when Kathie and Jeff meet for the second time, she points out that he hasn''t even asked her what her name is, or where she comes from. Jeff's response is telling: "I'm thinking about where we're going." Identities and place histories seem to vanish, or at least lose their importance, opening up to new possibilities detached from interpellative institutions or agencies of the Law. As Oliver and Trigo suggest in *Noir Anxiety*, "the South is often reduced to an imaginary destination: the mythical place of escape" (Oliver and Trigo 225) where passion, danger, and sexual promiscuity are the order of the day (think, for example, of Welles's *Touch of Evil*). It is here that Jeff and Kathie meet and fall in love, where their twilight romance begins ("I never saw her in the daytime. We seemed to live by night"), and where they decide to flee together into some unknown future destination:

> Jeff: You're going with me?
> Kathy: Where?
> Jeff: Where ever it takes us.
> Kathie: Why?
> Jeff: To make a life for ourselves. To get away from Whit. He knows I'm here.

37 Like a harbinger of their failure to escape the past, Whit suddenly appears the following morning as they are about to meet for their departure. After Jeff has convinced Whit that he's lost track of Kathie, he and Kathie travel northward to San Francisco, where, after some time, they begin to feel sure they're finally free: as Jeff says, "after all there wasn't one chance in a million we'd bump into our past." Of course, it is precisely here that they are spotted, and things begin to spiral out of control. When the two of them are followed,

Kathie murders their pursuer, who at once threatens a return of the (repressed) past and threatens to compromise Kathie's autonomy. After the murder, Kathie flees once again, forgetting her bankbook and thereby leaving Jeff evidence that she had been lying to him. This scene reiterates what is at stake in her initial shooting of, stealing from and fleeing from Whit. Her actions compromise positions of masculine authority and control. On the one hand, she refuses to have her feminine *jouissance* curtailed by Jack Fisher (Steve Brodie), who represents an economy of power exchange between men. As Jeff is incapable of mastering this threat, Kathie inserts herself into the masculine exchange of power and, shooting Jack, short-circuits it once again with her explosive feminine *jouissance*. Not only does this produce a male corpse, but it adds to the increasing number of indices that point toward Jeff's lack of masculine authority and his helplessness, his loss of identity, in close proximity to the unbearable plentitude Kathie represents.

38 With a shift back to the present, Jeff and Ann are about to arrive at Whit's house, where she drops him off and then returns to Bridgeport. The movie's structure itself, with the shift from present to past, and back to a present inhabited by characters out of the past, mimics the perpetual return at work in the narrative. In the car on the way to Whit's, Ann asks Jeff if he'd ever seen Kathie again, to which he answers "no." Then she asks him if he ever wanted to, to which he also replies in the negative. This exchange also encapsulates what is at stake in the overall *diegesis* (the inevitable return of the past/repressed), for though he hasn't seen her again, and despite the fact that he doesn't want to, as part of his past, he can't escape Kathie, who he again meets right after Ann has dropped him off.

39 Convincing Jeff to do one last job for him, Whit signals Jeff's debt to paternal law by saying "[s]ee Jeff, you owe me something. You'll never be happy until you square yourself." As Whit's paternal authority is in itself insufficient, with masculinity in crisis at various locations throughout the narrative, he supplements it with recourse to illegitimate means (which function as a reflection to the illegitimacy of his own masculine authority): blackmail. Whit has false evidence stating that Jeff had murdered his former partner, Jack Fisher, when in fact it had been Kathie who shot and killed Fisher. During this 'final job,' Jeff realizes that he is being setup, though he is able to bring Sterling to an agreement in which he would reveal Kathie as Fisher's actual murderer. To maintain her autonomy and avoid succumbing to authority, Kathie shoots Sterling (again!), this time killing him, and tries to convince Jeff that, being made for one another, they should leave the country together. Jeff pretends to agree, but this final outburst of feminine *jouissance* that extinguishes the enjoying father exposes too much. Kathie's attempt to appeal to Jeff's drive becomes a transparent tool of manipulation. As they are preparing to leave Sterling's house, Jeff covertly calls the police. When they get onto the road and Kathie sees the roadblock, she realizes Jeff has betrayed her and shoots him, the police shoot her, and the car crashes. Jeff's past literally returns to claim him.

40 On the one hand, Jeff seems to be punished, ultimately, for his involvement with the *femme fatale*, who represents an unbearable plentitude, and also for having 'stolen' something from the representative of phallic authority (it is in this sense that *film noir* comments on the role of *woman* as a commodity, the *femme fatale* representing a backlash to a cultural history of social negotiations among men that take place, as Bronfen has poignantly illustrated, over the site of a woman's - usually dead - body).[11] Or, we might say that the 'moral' of the story is simply that you can't escape your past, composed as it is of symbolic fictions, interpellative institutions, and tensions regulated by the Law), and Jeff's death is justified by his attempt to do so. Nevertheless, one must at the same time

recognize the repeated failure of phallic authority and paternal Law throughout the narrative.

41 To begin with, we might return to Copjec's paraphrasing of Lacan, stating that

> the old modern order of desire, ruled over by an oedipal father, has begun to be replaced by a new order of the drive, in which we no longer have recourse to the protections against *jouissance* that the oedipal father once offered (Copjec 182)

42 Accordingly, in setting himself in a position of submission to Kathie as opposed to attempting to replace Whit's phallic authority, Jeff tries "to establish a relation to her that bears the marks of pre-Oedipal fantasy. In his love for her he transgresses, then, against the whole regime of masculine authority" (Krutnik 106). The breakdown of masculine authority that *noir* repeatedly stages has often been attributed to a loss of faith in established institutions as a result of the Great Depression and two World Wars. David Reid and Jayne Walker state that "the depression dealt extraordinarily harsh blows to the 'phallic' cult of aggressiveness, individualism and self-reliance" (Reid and Walker 63). In terms of how the crisis of masculine authority manifests itself in *film noir*, Fred Pfeil indicates the

> existential choice of moral behavior according to one's own individual ethical code, in a hopelessly dark universe in which more consensual authorities are ineffectual, irrelevant, or corrupt (Pfeil 229).

43 This indeed holds true for "consensual authorities," but as *Out of the Past* shows, it can also hold true for obscene fathers outside the law. In the end, Whit's authority is no more effective than Jeff''s.

44 It seems, then, with the failure of masculine authority, paternal Law, and with the *femme fatale*'s feminine *jouissance* and her unbearable plentitude, that the *noir* genre might be interpreted as staging a series of failures to uphold traditional Oedipal structures of phallic authority. In *Out of the Past*, the entire Oedipal structure collapses: Markham's hard-boiled masculine authority is defused by an overproximity to the impossible object of desire in all its traumatic force, the *femme fatale*, along with which paternal Law fails, and subsequent attempts at establishing masculine law/authority collapse into solitude, into an individual (phantasmatic) moral, or into outright lawlessness. As an extension of his past, it's no wonder the symbolic fictions Jeff hopes to establish in the town of Bridgeport remain an impossible dream.

45 However, there is still another perspective from which we can approach the film's narrative as moralizing regarding Jeff's death and the consequences that follow.If we return to the point when Ann asks Jeff not to go to Whit, and he says that he has to, that he doesn't want to keep running, we are reminded of Jeff's attempt at *legitimacy* (this return of the past and the protagonist's active return *to* the past in order to gain control of the future is also a prominent feature of *A History of Violence*). Jeff tries to legitimately reinvent himself (and stake a new claim to agency) by confronting the paternal Law and making all of his secrets known to Ann, hoping to open the way to a 'normal' life in Bridgeport. From this point of view, his death may seem unjustified; that is, it may appear to signify that there is, in any case, no use in confronting your past and trying to legitimately establish yourself as a social subject, answerable to the various ideological apparatuses through which you might be interpellated. Such an interpretation would, nevertheless, neglect the exchange that takes place between Ann and the mute at the film's end.

46 The car-crash scene is followed by one in which Ann's longtime suitor, Jimmy (Richard Webb), tries to convince Ann to go away with him. She says that she can't, and then walks away from him over to the mute boy sitting on a bench by the gas station. When she asks him if Jeff was actually running off with Kathie, the boy lies, nodding his head in the affirmative so that Ann will be able to emotionally separate herself from Jeff and get a sense of closure. Ann then walks back to Jimmy's car and drives off with him, signaling that she has, in fact, finally chosen him. The film closes with the boy waving in salutation to the sign bearing Jeff's name, a gesture that seems to signify that the lie to Ann was made with some kind of deference to Jeff. In effect, Jeff's death and the boy's lie restore order to life in Bridgeport.

47 As we witness early in the film, both Ann's family and the community do not approve of Ann's and Jeff's relationship, nor, of course, does Jimmy: as Marny (the diner owner, played by Mary Field) tells Stephanos, Ann is "Jim's girl." From the beginning, Jeff is a man with an unknown and thus questionable past, and Ann is a dreamer ("every time I look at the sky, I think of all the places I've never been") allured by Jeff's mysteriousness. This combination is not something the conventional social structure upholding the community of Bridgeport is eager to integrate. With this in mind, the film's tagline – "A man trying to run away from his past...a woman trying to escape her future" - takes on new meaning. Instead of reading Kathie as the woman trying to escape her future, we should read Ann as the woman trying to escape her future, determined as it is by the socio-symbolic structures at work in Bridgeport and the interpellative machinery of her history there that provide her with a sense of identity.

48 The moralizing content signified by a return of order to the town of Bridgeport and by the lie that *frees* Ann from any fantasies about either running off or settling down with Jeff, then, is moralizing insofar as it positions itself *vis-à-vis* and against the grain of the American dream's myth of reinvention. What is suggested here, and what *film noir* generally suggests, rather, is that where the attempt to escape the past and become history-less must end in the death of the subject, subjectivity in the future is attainable precisely via the socio-symbolic matrixes that have constituted our pasts.

49 The problem of history staged in *Out of the Past* is, then, at least two-fold: 1. history - the inescapability of personal histories in their relation to socio-symbolic structures, and 2. his-story - the historical fallibility of masculine authority as a history of violence (most immediately, the World Wars and the Depression).

50 As a distant remake of *Out of the Past*, I'm interested in the way Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* reframes these two histories, which it no doubt does, and whether it proposes a way out of the history of phallic authority by suggesting that the paternal metaphor, which curtails drive, is or can be replaced by something else from within the essential social unit of the family fiction. Instead of the phallic Law, can there be another location of the castrative? If so, *History* suggests that it is to be found in the communal element of the family fiction: it is not one element that keeps desire in play (the paternal metaphor), but rather an entire, collectively agreed-upon structure that keeps desire in play and allows symbolic debt to continue to function.

51 *A History of Violence* opens with a scene of violence in a domestic setting. The camera slowly pans across the front of a motel, stopping to focus on two men coming out of a room. One of them (Stephen McHattie) goes into the office to check out. When he comes back out into the morning heat and finds that they need more water for their trip, he

sends his partner, Billy (Greg Bryk), back in to get some. This time the camera follows Billy into the office. He's leisurely in his manner, taking a couple of drags from his cigarette before entering, checking the pay telephone for change, looking at postcards. Then, as the camera follows him right as he passes in front of the check-in counter, we see a bloody hand streak across its top and a dead man, also covered in blood, slumped in a chair. Billy walks behind the counter, still leisurely, ringing the front desk bell and picking something up off a shelf to look at it. He opens the refrigerator and takes a can of soda. As he moves a cleaning cart out of the way so he can fill a plastic gallon jug with water, the camera pans across the floor, halting to focus on a woman lying dead in a pool of blood. Billy, unperturbed, begins to fill the jug of water from a cooler as a frightened little girl appears in the doorway next to him. When she whimpers, he puts his finger to his mouth and whispers "shhh." While he's doing this, he slowly draws a gun from the back of his pants, aims, and shoots the little girl.

52 The scene is important as it establishes the thematic tensions upon which the narrative is based. In the portrayal of this casual though intimate violence, what stands out is ease with which the violence takes place among men who have a long history of violence. The scene seems to gesture toward a history of masculine violence *vis-à-vis* the family fiction, represented by the corpses (father, mother, child) in the office. The tensions at play in the film, then, are based in a history of masculine violence and in the potential effect history has on the domestic setting of the family fiction. The opening sequence is also important as it functions as the counter-site to the 'intact' domestic setting we witness immediately following the murder of the little girl in the office. With a scream and a gunshot, the camera cuts to little Sarah Stall (Heidi Hayes), herself screaming as she wakes up from a nightmare, in response to which the entire Stall family joins her on her bed to comfort her.

53 As fate would have it, the two men from the hotel eventually show up at Tom Stall's (Viggo Mortensen) diner and attempt to rob it. When it becomes clear that the men aren't only going to rob the diner, but also do violence to the people in it, Tom kills the two of them in a manner that, in its efficiency, doesn't quite seem to fit his character. There's good reason for this, as we soon find out. Tom himself has a history of violence that no one in the quiet town of Millbrook would have expected. But, having discovered his whereabouts through the media coverage his heroic act garners, gangsters from Tom's past quickly appear on the scene, and Tom must struggle to convince his family that he is who they've always thought he was, and not Joey Cusack, a dangerous mobster killer from Philly.

54 As Tom's history increasingly encroaches on the present, he is repeatedly forced to confront his past identity, both on a practical level (he must physically employ violence), and as a return of the repressed (violent drive is mixed into his management of authority and into sexually charged desire). When he kills again, this time to protect his family and his potential physical removal from it, his wife Edie (Maria Bello) and son Jack (Ashton Holmes) witness him as Joey the killer. At this point, the past threatens to engulf him and destroy the wholesome (symbolic) unity of the family fiction. Like Jeff Bailey''s attempt to legitimate his self-fashioning, Tom decides he must confront the past, first, by telling Edie the truth about who he is (or was), and, next, by returning to the scene of the past to tie up some proverbial loose ends.

55 When Tom''s brother, the representative of phallic *jouissance*, calls later that night, Tom gets into his car and drives into the *noir* landscape of Philadelphia to confront this all-

enjoying false father. Moving from the domestic scene of Millbrook to the urban setting of Philadelphia, Tom is immersed in his *noir* past (now with a pronouncedly Philadelphia accent, "Yeah, I'm Joey"), where *noir idéologie* rules:

> Murder is now fully institutionalized as a taken-for-granted event that is not in itself worthy of consideration or concern. All that is important to the action is the preservation of an *image* of ideal bourgeois freedom and respectability. This image is held up as an ultimate ideal, but it is not. It is only the outer wrapping or mask for the free play of the capitalist father who pretends to assume the responsibilities of a patriarch but does not and, in fact, enjoys the privileges of the totemic *père jouissant* (Pfeil 292).

56 Fred Pfeil's description of *noir* morality (the lack of it), pretenses of respectability, and totemic enjoyment are precisely what we witness in the character of Richie Cusack (William Hurt), with his *faux* feudal manor, his hired troop of clumsy killers, and his total lack of domestication.

57 As the totemic *père jouissant*, Richie recounts the story of trying to strangle his brother as an infant and states that he could never marry and settle down with one woman as he prefers to take pleasure in all of them. Thus, when Joey/Tom kills the phallic *père jouissant* in order to maintain his symbolic fictions, his stake in the family fiction to be precise, it looks rather like an exact model of what is at stake in Freud's totemic establishment of paternal Law. The question is, then, does *A History of Violence* simply return to a model of masculine authority? What is its portrayal of gendered authority? Although the return of *noir* opens onto the return of the family fiction (as it does in *Out of the Past*), the coordinates for gendered authority are already renegotiated. We don't, for example, witness "the destruction of a basically good man by a corrupt woman he loves" (Blake Lucas on *Out of the Past* in Silver and Ward 218-19). What we witness, rather, is a conflation *noir*'s gender characteristics into single characters.

58 With Edie Stall, the *femme fatale*'s sexuality and agency is conflated with the nurturing suburban housewife/mother. Edie can contain her feminine *jouissance* and act in a castrative capacity. In the first bedroom scene, for example, she stages a performance of forbidden teenage sex while the 'parents' are away. When Tom asks "what did you do with my wife," she responds that there are "no wives in here mister." The counter-scene to this 'play' Edie sets in motion is the sex scene on the stairs, where there are no more masks, no more protective fictions, which is brutal, and which she enjoys, and then walks away from in disgust. On the other hand, she is also the protective mother who is as quick and to the point with her words as any hard-boiled gritty detective ("You stay the fuck away from my family you son of a bitch").

59 In Tom, the 'good citizen' and 'thug gangster' is collapsed into one. That is, he is domesticated despite his history of violence, though he is not emasculated like Bailey. Even the hard-boiled task of finding the killer and setting things right, played out between the *noir* hero and his adversaries, is conflated in Tom, as his search simply leads him back to his own past (granted, the oppositions between good guy and bad guy are often rather opaque in *noir*), and that which he must destroy is any and all remnants of what he formerly was. Tom destroys the masculine, phallic *jouissance* of his past (with his own access to it),the *père jouissant* in order to secure the domestic setting and his position within it. The totemic father is dispersed with so that the family might remain intact. But perhaps there is a difference between the paternal Law or phallic authority that commences from the death of the totemic father and the structures of authority established in *A History of Violence*.

60 In the end, Tom's authority is not his own. Rather, it is structural: when positions of authority are renegotiated through the determination of whether or not he may retain a place within the family fiction (a decision that clearly rests with Edie), Edie's acceptance of him back into the domestic scene (what could be more domestic than a family sitting down to dinner?), into the family fiction, is subtended by a consensual lie: that a history of violence has not determined who the father is, that the family is a unity with no fissures.

61 One might initially interpret the acceptance of the father's 'history of violence,' even after his return to it, as a gesture reintroducing paternal authority in the family fiction in both its castrative and its penetratory capacity: the father as curtailing agency and at the same time an 'enjoying' father - that is, the father as phallus. One must ask, though, in what manner is this father being accepted back into the family fiction? In so doing, we have already arrived at the shift at stake here. In the end, the question is who maintains authority in the family fiction? Who decides which symbolic positions are viable and which not? When Tom returns, after the bloodbath he orchestrates in Philadelphia, after his departure from his history of violence, to the family fiction, it is the rest of the family lead by the mother that permits his reemergence into the family fiction. If Tom stands in for post-feminist, emancipated (domestic) masculinity with what is precisely 'a history of violence' - to be understood in the full historical implications of male-dominated cultural ideologies - his reinstatement in the capacity of paternal authority is staged within a context of complicity, not domination. As such, it automatically sets itself apart from the coordinates of the pre-feminist 'phallic' paternal authority.

62 If what is staged is the inescapability of the past, the inevitability of the return of the repressed, it is not staged, as in classic noir, as a finality. It returns to the notion of the family as the primary symbolic fiction and location of interpellative authority, with the symbolic fiction staged as a communal, consensual lie; *but not with the possibility of there being more than a lie elsewhere*. That is, it is not opposed to an 'honest' family history as in *Out of the Past* (Ann and Jim in Bridgeport). As such, it makes the claim that our pasts are no less fictitious than an attempt at reinvention, and that that identity - always already socially bound as it is - is contingent upon recognition from symbolic communities. *Noir* makes this point, but does not leave a way out for reinvention. The masculine 'past' or 'history' inevitably leads to doom, as it has lead the masculine *noir* 'hero' to isolation.

63 *History of Violence* makes the claim that the 'open wound' of masculine authority and phallic law can not simply be escaped, but can potentially be re-placed by a domestic contract: a symbolic fiction, subtended by a communal lie, and the agreement to relinquish *jouissance* - or at least share it.

NOTES

1. Quotes from Cronenberg's audio commentary on the DVD (Warner Home Video, 2006). Notably, in Edward Hopper: *An Intimate Biography* (1995), Gail Levin suggests that the

painting Nighthawks (1942) was inspired by Hemingway's "The Killers," which Hopper read for the first time when it appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1927 and which was adapted for the screen by Robert Siodmak in 1946.

2. Elizabeth 121.

3. "Knowledge, Morality, and Tragedy in *The Killers* and *Out of the Past*." In Mark T. Conrad's *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 171.

4. For more on this topic, see also Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

5. Also, despite the fact that Carnegie, Rockefeller, and various other turn-of-the-century industrial giants often engaged in philanthropic activities, one should note that over forty percent of the wealth in the United States was concentrated in the top one percent of household.

One should additionally note the systemic, institutionalised violence that also belonged to ideology of such giants of industry.

6. In American literature, Fitzgerald's Gatsby is the quintessential embodiment of this concept.

7. See Richard Feldstein, "The Dissolution of the Self in Zelig".

8. As Joan Copjec suggests, "[o]n the narrative level the defense against the drive takes another, but no less genre defining form: that of the *femme fatale*" (Copjec 192).

9. See Juliet Flower MacCannell's "Between the Two Fears," 47.

10. Frank Krutnik points out that the negotiation of contracts and their socio-symbolic significance is "heavily foregrounded" in *Out of the Past* (Krutnik 245-6).

11. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992) is the definitive work on male negotiations taking place at the site of dead female bodies. Recall Ian Jarvie's statement that "[j]ust because bad actions are in the past does not mean that they are settled [...] To protect the respectable, those who have knowledge must tell lies" (JArvie in Conrad 182).

INDEX

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